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AUTHOR Jorgensen, Earl; Mabry, Edward A.
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ABSTRACT

During the past decade, the influence of electronically recorded music and the message it transmits have caused media scholars to reexamine and modify the theories upon which the basic process of communication is dependent. While the five primary functions (source, transmitter, channel, receiver, and destination) remain unchanged, an additional element--the complex, formal organizations--has been inserted into the process. The formal organizations include the body of interdependent industries involved in the production of primary communication process functions essential to the medium's existence. In the pop music industry these elements include the artist, the producer, record company executives, the promoter, sponsors, advertising agencies, radio programming, radio station personnel, the audience, sponsor sales, and record consumption. The net output of this interdependent industrial body provides a filtering process through which all messages introduced into the medium must pass prior to reaching their ultimate destinations. A discussion of this process and its effect on communication, five explanatory charts, and a selected bibliography are included in this paper. (TS)

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A Structural Analysis

with Selected Bibliography

by

Earl Jorgensen

and

Edward A. Mabry

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Introduction

During the past decade, the emergence of the so-called youth sub-culture and related social phenomena has prompted many social scientists to acknowledge the influence of electronically recorded music and the message transmitted therein on American society. As Irvine and Kirkpatrick (1972) state, "one would be clearly correct to assert that music, in contemporary society, plays a key role in the development and maintenance of attitudes and values held by various groups within the general population." Although the extent of this influence remains unknown, researchers are now attempting to determine the extent to which these musical messages are understood and subscribed to by members of the listening audience. Yet concentration solely on the evaluation of message reception is inadequate for achieving an overall understanding of the phenomena. It must be recognized that relevant variables affecting message reception are often directly linked to those variables which affect message formulation and transmission. In other words, the entire complex process of communication, functioning within the framework of the electronically recorded music medium, must be examined.

While the number of definitions for the communication process reaches almost infinite proportions, media scholars generally acknowledge the existence of five primary functions upon which the basic process of communication is dependent: "(1) a source generated one signal (message) from a number of alternative possibilities. The signal was then traced from a (2) transmittor through a (3) channel to some (4) receiver, where the transmitted signal was reconverted into its original form for its (5) destination" (Mortensen, 1973, p. 36). It is also generally accepted that, when applied to the structural framework of the

mass media, the process is modified in that the actual message transmission becomes dependent on the operation of complex, formal organizations; the channel through which the message is distributed is man-made rather than natural, and the message is, upon reaching its destination, available to every person having access to a receiver (Schramm, 1955).

Fig. 1. Primary Functions within the Basic Communication Process

In order to valuate the effects of these modifications within the basic communication process, the chain of primary functions must be reexamined. While these primary functions remain unchanged, it must be recognized that an additional element, specifically the complex, formal organizations, has been inserted into the process and must be accounted for. By assuming control of those primary functions directly concerned with the distribution of the message (transmittor, channel and receiver) these complex formal organizations interrupt the direct link between the source and destination. Both are now dependent on the complex, formal organizations for access to the remaining basic functions nesessary for completion of the communication process. Both source (communicator) and destination (audience) are now, in a sense, separated from the actual mechanics of message distribution, forming what Bretz (1971) refers to as a user subsystem within the process. The remaining functions (transmission, channel and receivers) remainin under the control of the complex formal organizations (interdependent industries) assume the role of Bretz' communication

medium subsystem.

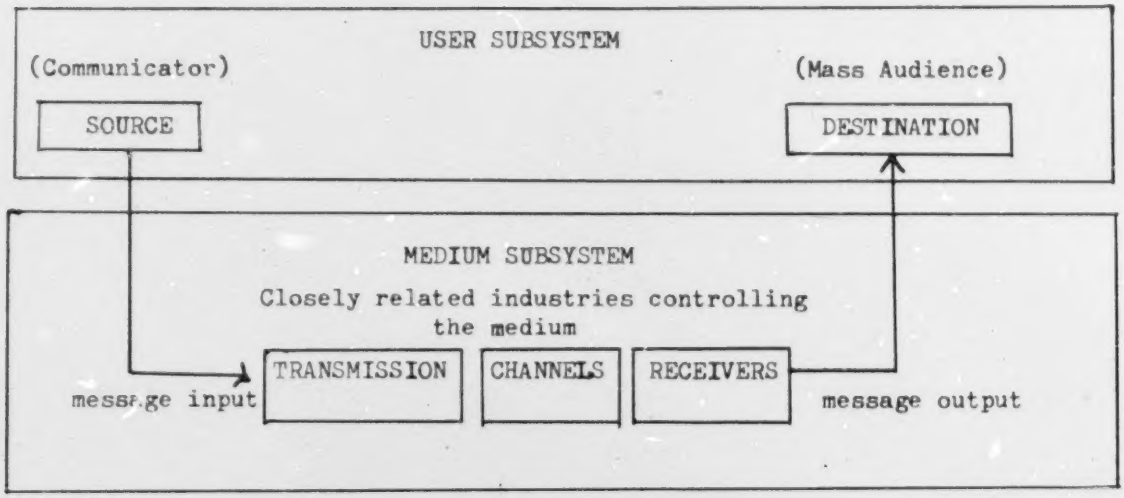

Fig. 2. Primary Functions within the Basic Mass Communication System

One major result of this division within the primary function chain of the basic communication process is immediately evident in the alterations of the relationship previously enjoyed by both communicator and audience. Attempts at direct interaction between the two are severly restricted in that discourse now must be channeled through the intermediary operations of a communication medium. The interpersonal relationship is thus severed, reducing communication to an "impersonal" level (Lohisse, 1973; McQuail, 1969) in which as McQuail describes, "an anonymous audience is addressed by persons known only in their public role as communicators."

Responsible inquiry must, however, acknowledge other, more subtle results of this process modification. As Guback (1974) states: "Each medium presents its own terms for communication, because each possess certain objective properties which impose themselves on the message maker and audience alike.

These technical characteristics implicitly establish parameters within which a message maker must work and define the grounds on which he approaches his subject matter. . . . The properties of a medium have significant ramifications. They are the conditions that a communicator must work through in approaching his subject matter and making messages about it. By channeling his own operation upon reality, they inevitably affect the audience's view of the world provided through the representations" (pp. 66-71).

The Nature of the Electronically Recorded Music Medium

The electronically recorded music medium, for all practical purposes, must be viewed as the current state of development in man's continuing effocts to apply technological achievement to the production and dissemination of music. Since the inception of this evolutionary challenge, the desire to achieve technical perfection has prompted the discovery and development of numerous innovative softwares, each of which, upon its introduction into the process, has resulted in a marked expansion of the medium's supportive industries. "The invention, manufacture, and diffusion of music machines have spread the opportunity to hear all sorts of music to nearly everybody... at almost anyplace and almost anytime. This is an achievement, not only of technology, but of merchandizing and advertising" (Hoover, 1971, p. 6). Consequently, the existing medium must be viewed in terms of a body of interdependent industries, each of which is involved to some degree in the production of one or more primary communication process functions essential to the medium's existence. (See Fig. 3.)

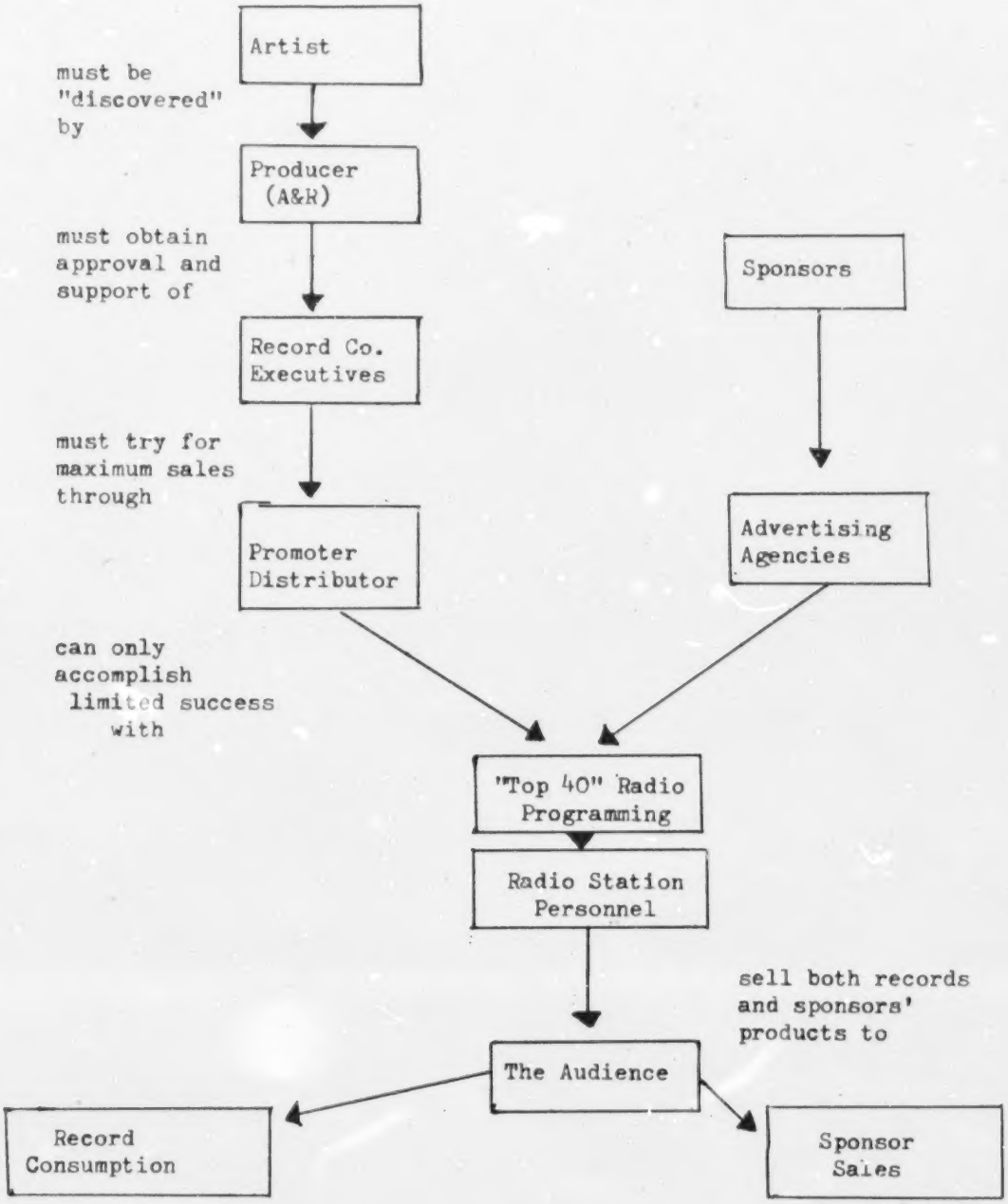

Fig. 3. The Organization of the Pop Music Industry

The net output of this interdependent industrial body provides a "filtering process" (Hirsch, 1973(?), 1972, 1969) through which all messages introduced into the medium must pass prior to reaching their ultimate destinations. Thus, a message (song), selected for processing by an organization associated with the recording industry, may be subjected to the recording process (transmission) and ultimately reproduced in quantity, either in the form of a phonograph record or recorded magnetic tape. However, unless further selection-processing takes place (promotion-distribution [channel] and play-back [receiver]) the message will be denied exposure to an audience (destination).

In order to understand the "filtering" or selection procedures employed in song/message processing by the electronically recorded music medium, still another characteristic of the mass media must be examined. In a manner similar to other successful mass communication media, the electronically recorded music medium, or more specifically, the body of interdependent industries which produce the medium's primary functions, operate with the intention of meximum profit through minimum expenditure. To accomplish this end, organizations within the medium carefully monitor shifting trends in public tastes. "There's always room for a new fad because fads mean money" (C.B.S. News, 1974). Thus the songs/messages which eventually survive the "filtering" process are primarily those thought to be most attuned to the current tastes of the mass audience or those considered most likely to generate the greatest amount of revenue for the industry.

"The application of technology to music through the recording process extended the concert hall to the living room and allowed the individual listener to select whatever he wanted to hear, providing some company felt it profitable

enough to record. . . . The economic mode of support for communications has a decisive impact upon the creative process, not only by providing the rhetoric in which the functions of communication are stated, but also by establishing the conditions for the way in which tools are used to make messages. . . . [(C)ontrolling industries] determine the ends to which the instruments are directed, provide the environment which fundamentally determines which kind of artists, using what tools in which ways, can make messages" (Guback, 1974, pp. 73-78).

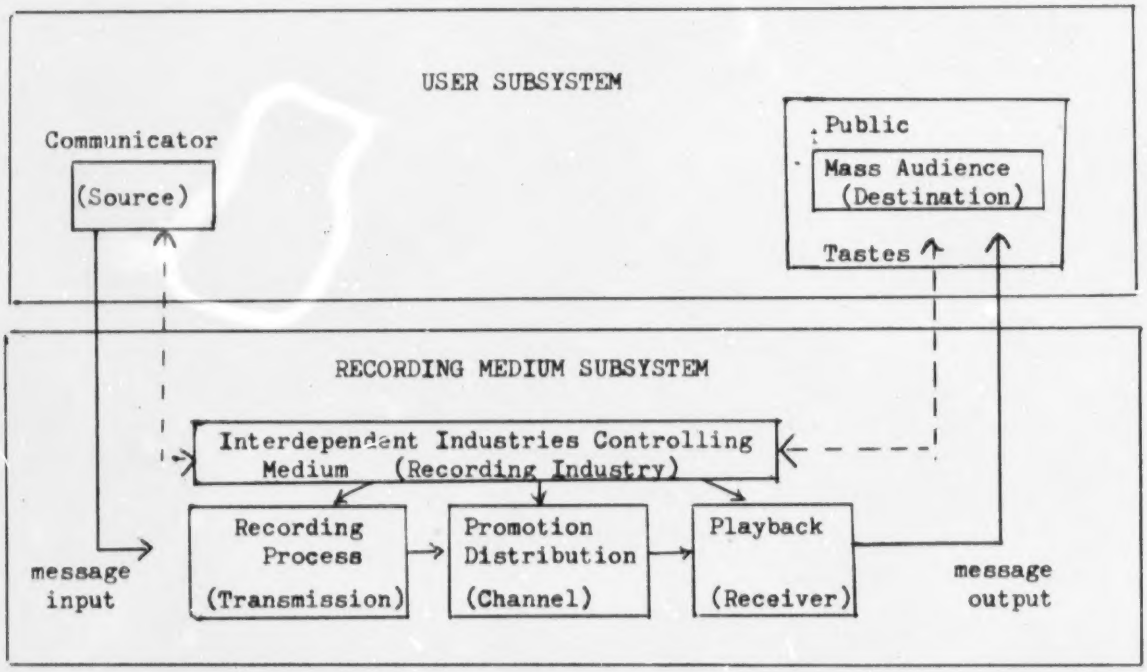

Fig. 4. Primary Functions within the Electronically Recorded Music Medium

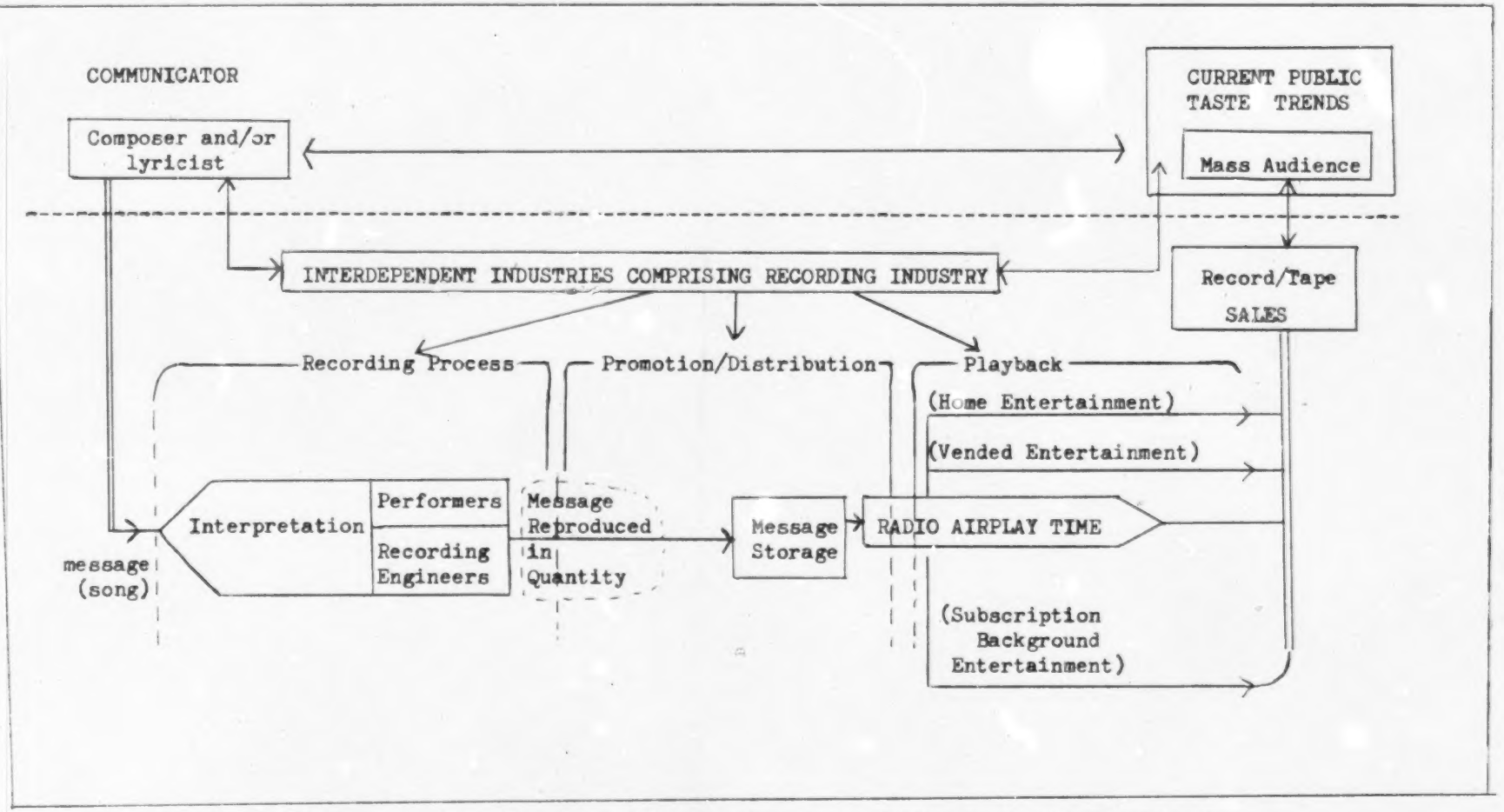

Fig. 5. The Basic Communication Process within the Framework of the Electronically Recorded Music Medium

The Electronically Recorded Music Medium as a Vehicle for Communication

While the creative boundaries imposed by the nature of the medium undoubtedly influence the communicator's judgments concerning style and other internal structured aspects of song/message construction, the effects of other variables resulting from message processing procedures must also be examined. Songs/messages, once selected by the medium, are often filtered through the process several times. Consequently, a message expressing its creator's impressions of reality may subsequently be interpreted by both performers and technicians, and eventually reach the mass audience in a form other than that originally conceived by its composer.

The communication process as channeled through the electronically recorded music medium is further complicated in that the medium's playback functions possess a degree of flexibility unique in the electronic mass media. Although the radio appears to serve as the medium's primary playback device (C.B.S. News, 1974), message reconversion is by no means limited to the radio. Copies of recorded songs/messages may be purchased by individual members of the mass audience and reconverted on home playback devices as desired. Thus, as Clarke (1973) states, "Record-listening differs in quality from the other (mass) media. It is a purposive communicative act, requiring the audience to choose among alternative messages. Content availability and selection are under the user's control" (p. 554).

Discussion

That messages are, in fact, distributed through the electronically recorded music medium is obvious. Yet, when attempting to determine the extent

to which these messages influence the development of attitudes in various groups within society, objective inquiry must also consider both the nature of the distribution medium, and the nature of the restrictions imposed by that medium on the communication process. While content analysis of medium messages has documented the existence of such controversial themes as the immorality of war and the glorification of sex and drugs (Robinson and Hirsch, 1969; Cole, 1971; Denisoff and Levine, 1971), conclusions regarding message impact must be drawn with an awareness of the medium's filtering process and governing policy of processing those messages most attuned to the latest fads and trends within mass society. "The popular song has become a most revealing index to American life in general. It sums up the ethics, the habits, the slang, the intimate character of every generation, and will tell as much to future students of current civilization as any histories, biographies, or news papers of the time" (Spaeth, 1948, p. 103).

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Introductory Literature

The literature contained within this category appears to be written with the expressed purpose of acquainting the reader with the overall phenomenon. While the majority focuses on rock 'n' roll music and the youth culture, literature covering such related topics as the history of popular music has also been included.

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Structure of the Recording Industry

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